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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE RESPONSE TO ARF DISASTER RELIEF  
STATEMENT AND EXERCISES

REF: STATE 61440

ARF DISASTER RELIEF STATEMENT  
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11. (U) The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on June 17 welcomed the U.S. non-paper (reftel) that encourages an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Statement on Regional Disaster Preparedness. DFA Undersecretary for Policy Principal Assistant Leah Carada Rodriguez said that interest in her office was high, given recent disasters in China and Burma. However, Carada Rodriguez said that principal officers engaged in ARF matters were in Singapore and would not be able to provide meaningful feedback on the non-paper until next week at the soonest.

ARF DISASTER RELIEF EXERCISE  
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12. (SBU) Post also shared the reftel non-paper, including paragraph 7, with the DFA American Affairs Office Principal Assistant Michelle Eduarte. Eduarte explained to poloff June 17 that the Philippines' political commitment to hosting a disaster relief exercise is "firm," but that "interagency consultations" are necessary because the Philippines holds a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S., but not with other countries. Eduarte said that consultations were "progressing positively" but that a final outcome would hinge upon whether the Philippine Department of Justice viewed as constitutional the exercises and presence of foreign troops. She added that a final determination would not be possible until after July 2, when President Arroyo returns from the U.S. (President Arroyo departs June 21.) As a result, the mid-late June response deadline (reftel) for a definitive answer may not be feasible.

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